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CEREBUS GUYS

no.15

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Old Tavern - Wall of Tsi

215
FEB

E X C E R P T

His most interesting case was in the main building. The patient was a woman of thirty who had been in the clinic six months; she was an American painter who had lived long in Paris. They had no satisfactory history of her. A cousin had happened upon her all mad and gone and after an unsatisfactory interlude at one of the whoopee cures that fringed the city, dedicated largely to tourist victims of drug and drink, he had managed to get her to Switzerland. On her admittance she had been exceptionally pretty — now she was a living agonizing sore. All blood tests had failed to give a positive reaction and the trouble was unsatisfactorily catalogued as nervous eczema. For two months she had lain under it, as imprisoned as in the Iron Maiden. She was coherent, even brilliant, within the limits of her special hallucinations…

…The woman in room twenty could not see him when he came in — the area about her eyes was too tightly swollen. She spoke in a strong, rich, deep, thrilling voice.

"How long will this last? Is it going to be forever?"

"It's not going to be very long now. Doctor Ladislau tells me there are whole areas cleared up."

"If I knew what I had done to deserve this I could accept it with equanimity."

"It isn't wise to be mystical about it — we recognize it as a nervous phenomenon. It's related to the blush — when you were a girl, did you blush easily?"

She lay with her face turned to the ceiling.

"I have found nothing to blush for since I cut my wisdom teeth."

"Haven't you committed your share of petty sins and mistakes?"

"I have nothing to reproach myself with."

"You're very fortunate."

The woman thought a moment; her voice came up through her bandaged face afflicted with subterranean melodies:

"I'm sharing the fate of the women of my time who challenged men to battle."

"To your vast surprise it was just like all battles," he answered, adopting her formal diction.

"Just like all battles." She thought this over. "You pick a set-up, or else win a Pyrrhic victory, or you're wrecked and ruined — you're a ghostly echo from a broken wall."

"You are neither wrecked nor ruined," he told her. "Are you sure you've been in a real battle?"

"Look at me!" she cried furiously.

"You've suffered, but many women suffered before they mistook themselves for men." It was becoming an argument and he retreated. "In any case you mustn't confuse a single failure with a final defeat."

She sneered. "Beautiful words," and the phrase transpiring up through the crust of pain humbled him.

Last issue's Excerpt: Ernest Hemingway letter to Bernard Beronson (1952)

CEREBUS
NO. 215 FEBRUARY 1997

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GUYS
a novel
•
(Cerebus 201 to Cerebus 219)

MONTHLY
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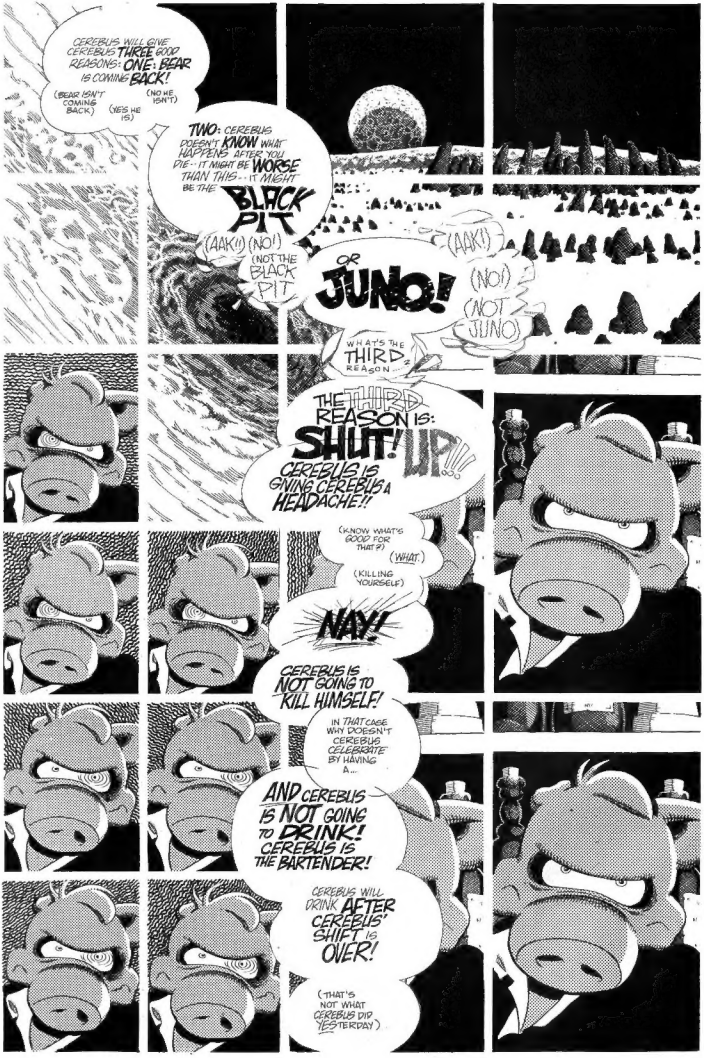
THIS!

IS RIDICULOUS.
KAFLIP
KAFLAP
KAFLIP
KAFLAP
KAFLIP

CEREBUS COULD JUST HEAD SOUTH. AYE? AND DO WHAT? FIND ANOTHER TAVERN. AYE? AND DO WHAT? MAKE SOME FRIENDS -- HAVE SOMEONE TO TALK TO.
OH AYE! MAKE SOME FRIENDS AND THEN THEY GET MARRIED -- OR THEIR GIRL FRIENDS COME BACK! RIGHT AYE YES AND THEN THEY ALL LEAVE AND
OKAY... OKAY! CEREBUS WOULD BE ALONE AGAIN ANYWAY. OKAY!! SO WHY BOTHER?
CEREBUS AGREES WITH CEREBUS -- CEREBUS DOESN'T HAVE TO... TO...
...BELABOUR THE POINT?
AYE. CEREBUS HATES IT WHEN CEREBUS DOES THAT.
WELL, IF CEREBUS WOULDN'T COME UP WITH ALL THESE STUPID THOUGHTS -- LIKE HEADING SOUTH AND FINDING ANOTHER TAVERN' CEREBUS WOULDN'T HAVE TO BELABOUR THE POINT
FINE
CEREBUS WILL JUST STAY HERE AND DIE ALONE, UNMOURNED AND UNLOVED...
OH, C'MON. CEREBUS ISN'T GOING TO START THAT AGAIN -- THE NEXT THING CEREBUS WILL BE...
WELL WHY SHOULDN'T CEREBUS KILL HIMSELF? GIVE CEREBUS ONE GOOD REASON WHY CEREBUS SHOULDN'T


CEREBUS WILL GIVE CEREBUS THREE GOOD REASONS: ONE: BEAR IS COMING BACK!
(BEAR ISN'T COMING BACK.)
(NO HE ISN'T.)
(YES HE IS)
TWO: CEREBUS DOESN'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU DIE-- IT MIGHT BE WORSE THAN THIS-- IT MIGHT BE THE BLACK PIT
(AAK!!)
(NO!)
(NOT THE BLACK PIT)
(AAK!)
OR JUNO!
(NO!)
(NOT JUNO)
WHAT'S THE THIRD REASON
THE THIRD REASON IS: SHUT! UP!!!
CEREBUS IS GIVING CEREBUS A HEADACHE!!
(KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR THAT?)
(WHAT.)
(KILLING YOURSELF)
NAY!
CEREBUS IS NOT GOING TO KILL HIMSELF!
IN THAT CASE WHY DOESN'T CEREBUS CELEBRATE BY HAVING A...
AND CEREBUS IS NOT GOING TO DRINK! CEREBUS IS THE BARTENDER!
CEREBUS WILL DRINK AFTER CEREBUS' SHIFT IS OVER!
(THAT'S NOT WHAT CEREBUS DID YESTERDAY)

CEREBUS MADE A MISTAKE YESTERDAY
(YESTERDAY'S MISTAKE)
(TODAY'S MISTAKE)
(TOMORROW'S MISTAKE)
(WHATTSA DIFFERENCE?!)
LES 'AVE A DRING!
HIC
AYE! CEREBUS'LL HAVA SCODGE
A BLIGEYA SCODGE FER CEREBUS OVER EERE
TWO PINES O' ALE WHILE YER UP
NO!
NO!
NO!
YES
YES
HIC
YES
NO DRINKING UNTIL CEREBUS IS DONE HIS SCODGE HIS SHIFT!
(E SEZ NO DRINGING...
AYE! WHO DIED AN' HIC LEF' 'IM KING?!)
LE'S TAGE A VOTE!
ALL IN FAYNER A HAUENA DRING SAY "AYE"
NAY.
AYE
AYE
AYE
AYE
WE WAND SCODGE KICK
WE WAND SCODGE KICK

MIS-TAH CEREBUS!
BOING
SHUT-UN-COLLAH FASTENED: WON DEMEDDIT POINT!!
PLOP
ELBOW ON THE BAH: WON DEMEDDIT POINT!!
TIE MISSING.
GASP!
FIVE DEMEDDIT POINTS!
JACKET UNBUTTONED:
WOULD YOU EXCUSE CEREBUS A MOMENT?
-HIS SHERLY
FAH DEMEDDIT POINTS!

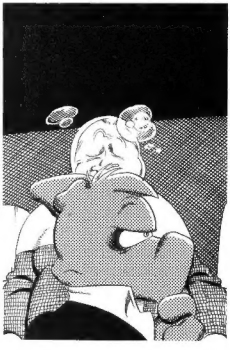
DIZ-GRACEFUL.
EE-LÄVEN DEMEDDIT POINTS ON YAW FLIHST INSPAKESHN
MUHCH AS IT PAINS ME TO DYOOSO...
I SHELL HOF TYEW REPOTE TO THE MUTHAWS OF DISTRICT 25 THET
!!
TROWZAHZ MISSING: TWELVE DEMEDDIT POINTS
SHOES AND SOCKS MISSING:
TUHWENTY DEMEDDIT...
CLATTER
SCRAPE
SIDDOWN

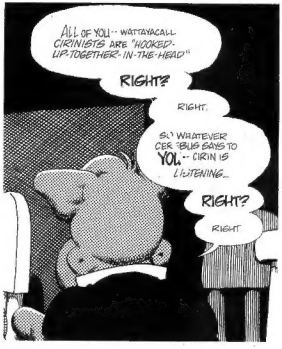
RRRALLY, NOW
I DEW'NT THINK YOU FULLY COMPRE
SIT.

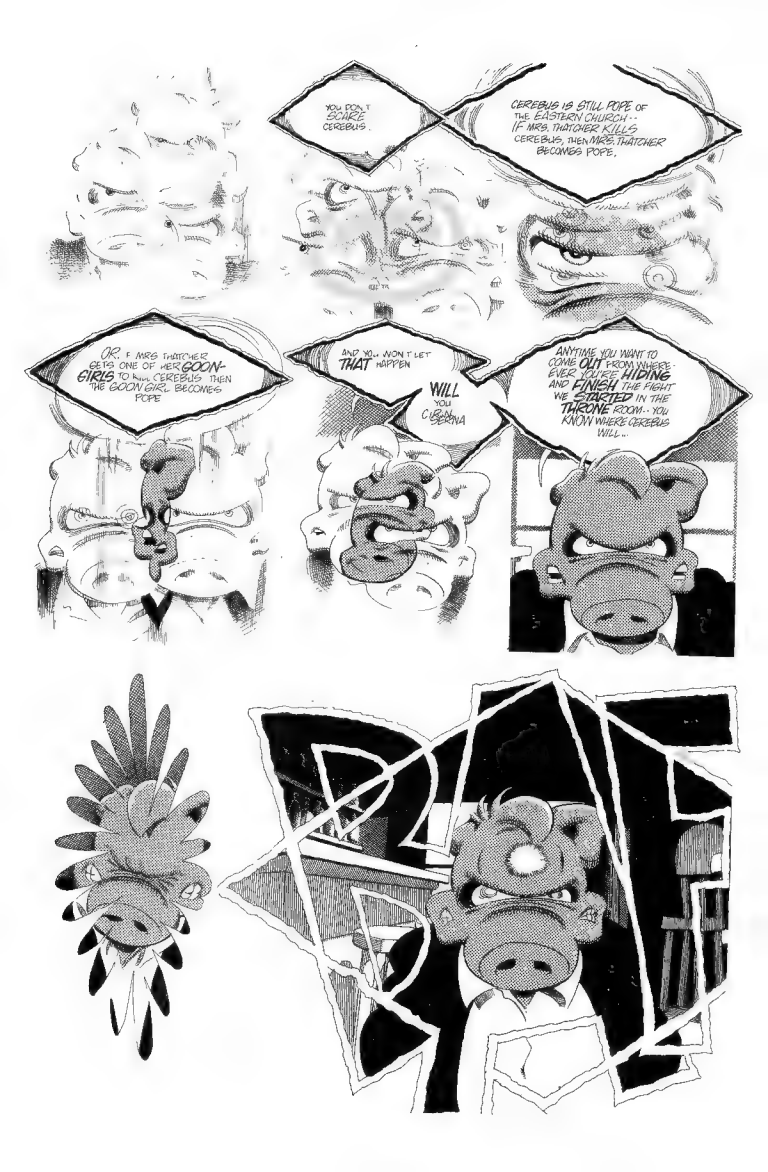
PLOP.

BATTLE
BATTLE
BATTLE

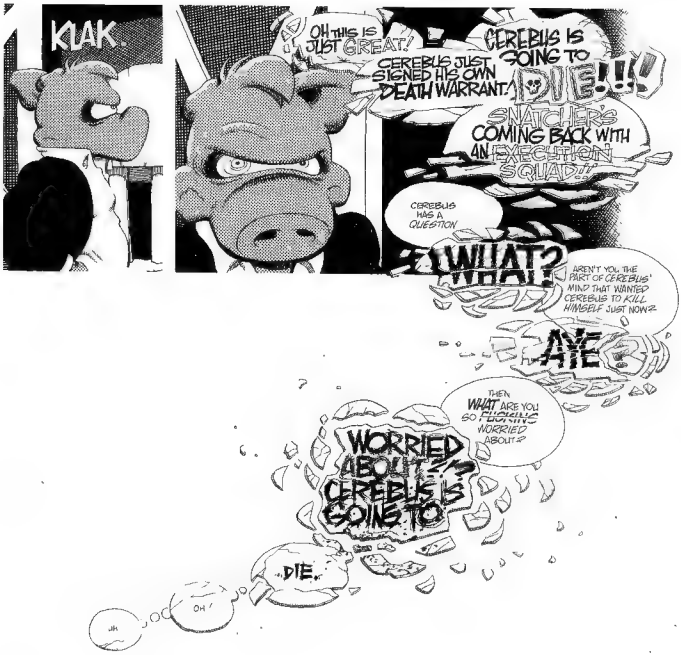
NOW
THEN
...




ALL OF YOU-- WATTAYACALL CHRIMSTS ARE "HOOKED-UP-TOGETHER-IN-THE-HEAD"
RIGHT?
RIGHT.
SO WHATEVER CER "BLUE GAYS TO YOU.-- CIRIN IS LISTENING...
RIGHT?
RIGHT


YOU DON'T SCARE CEREBUS.
CEREBUS IS STILL POPE OF THE EASTERN CHURCH -- IF MRS. THATCHER KILLS CEREBUS, THEN MRS. THATCHER BECOMES POPE.
OR, IF MRS THATCHER GETS ONE OF HER GOON-GIRLS TO KILL CEREBUS, THEN THE GOON GIRL BECOMES POPE.
AND YOU WON'T LET THAT HAPPEN
WILL YOU CEREBUS?
ANYTIME YOU WANT TO COME OUT FROM UNDER, EVER, YOU'RE HIDING AND FINISH THE FIGHT WE STARTED IN THE THRONE ROOM -- YOU KNOW WHERE CEREBUS WILL...

TRY THAT AGAIN, MRS T.
AND CEREBUS IS GONNA HAVE TO HURT YOU.
FOR REAL
UNDERSTOODZ
PIP PING
RATTLE RATTLE RAITLE
GREAT
MOM, BEAT IT.
CEREBUS HAS A LOT OF TH NNING TO DO
PIMP MEET
BOOP
POP
BOOP
CLUNK
KLIK KLAK
WAIT.
SNAP SNAP
THE LARDER
CEREBUS WANTS IT F LLED WITH RAW POTATOES AT ALL TIMES
UNDERSTOODZ
GREAT.

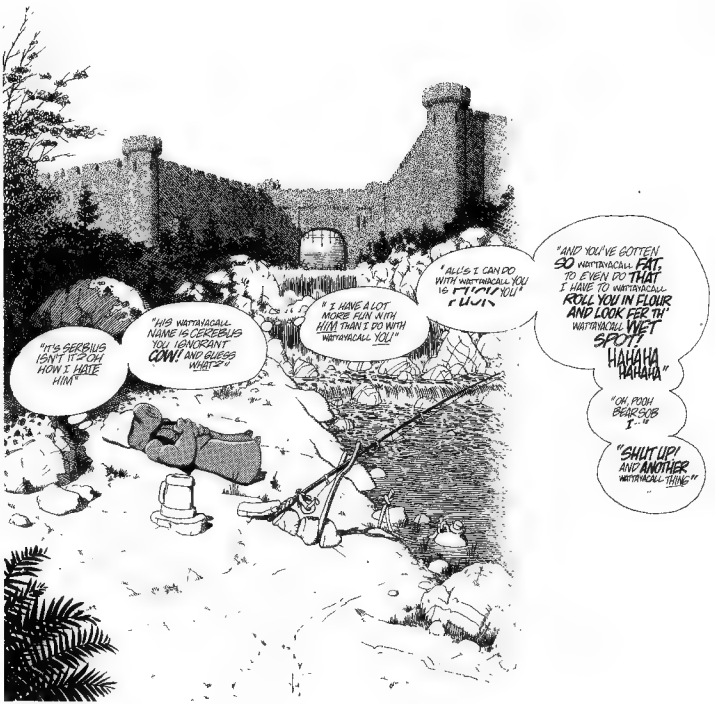

KLAK.
OH THIS IS JUST GREAT!
CEREBUS JUST SIGNED HIS OWN DEATH WARRANT!
CEREBUS IS GOING TO DIE!!!
SNATCHER'S COMING BACK WITH AN EXECUTION SQUAD!!
CEREBUS HAS A QUESTION
WHAT?
AREN'T YOU THE PART OF CEREBUS' MIND THAT WANTED CEREBUS TO KILL HIMSELF JUST NOW?
AYE.
THEN WHAT ARE YOU SO FUCKING WORRIED ABOUT?
WORRIED ABOUT? CEREBUS IS GOING TO
DIE.
OH!
UH.

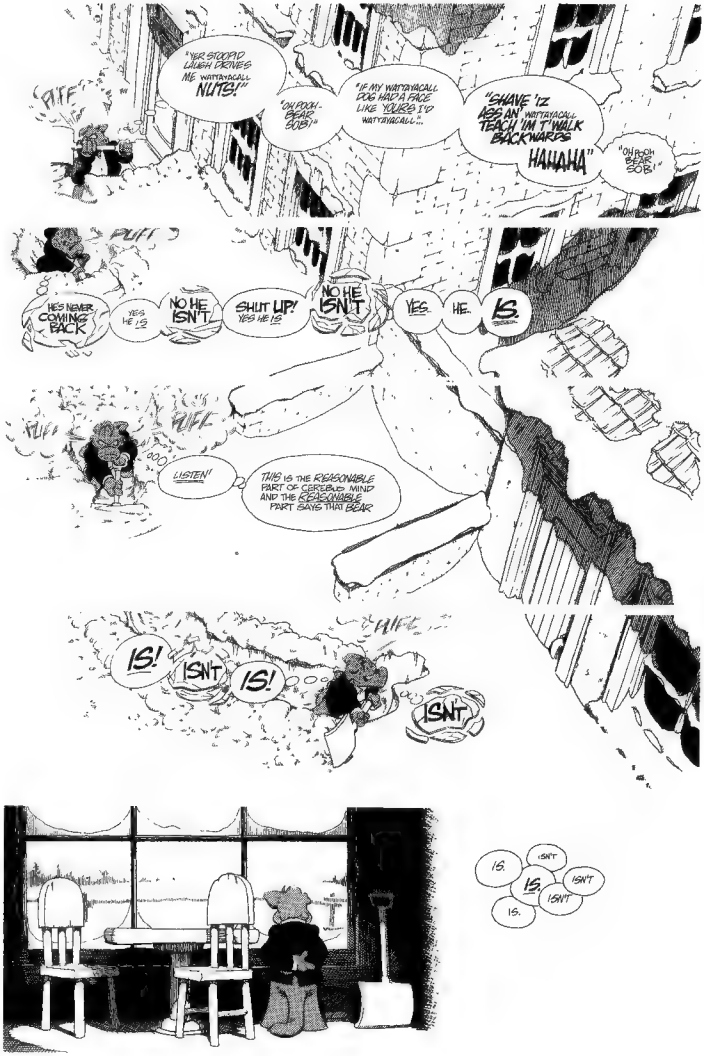
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
CRUNCH

CRNCH CRNCH
RAW POTATOES
CRNCH CRNCH
SCOTCH
GLP.
HEH. THIS IS PRETTY GOOD
THIS IS OKAY.
AYE
AYE
HOW CAN CEREBUS THINK THAT AT ANY MINUTE THEY COULD COME BURSTING IN HERE
AND KILL CEREBUS
CEREBUS IS NEVER GOING TO REST EASY AGAIN!
ANY MINUTE COULD BE CEREBUS' LAST!!
CEREBUS WON'T BE ABLE TO THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE EVER!!
HAUNTED! DAY!!! AND NIGHT! NEVER KNOWING WHEN IT MIGHT BE TIME! TIME!
OPEN: SUN-UP TO SUN-DOWN
THE MANAGEMENT
CRNCH CRNCH
TIME FOR ANOTHER SCOTCH
OPEN: SUN-UP
ISN'T CEREBUS LISTENING?
LISTENING TO WHAT?
AH
Lewk.
Make.

AWWLL I'M SAYIN EZ: et ezzit aPROPER PINT--
ez AWL I'UM'
AND ALL CEREBUS IS SAYING IS
THAT'S THE WAY IT COMES OUT OF THE TAPS
(THEY'RE BUSTED OR SOMETHING)
JUST DRINK WHAT'S THERE..
AND CEREBUS WILL GET YOU ANOTHER ONE.
BYE?
Ohoh VARRY Nice.. VARRY REFRAYSHING
Ach! THAEGS THAT NAE Ah' SPOT ayr gric
SEE? WHAT DID CEREBUS TELL YOU ?
SAME AGAIN?
I WAZ BAENG WITH'RENGLY SARCASTIC..
(foor you- EHfoor mayshuh')
SO DOES THAT MEAN YOU DO WANT ANOTHER ONE?
OR YOU DON'T WANT ANOTHER ONE?
Flip
What et MAENZ ez: I am WEEHDROWeng mae CUSTOM froom theess esTABlishmaent..
and enCOORagi'ng mae CAMPAETRIOTS tyew dyew LAEKWAEZ
You wel FAEND thet Alec Aedward McQUARRY ez NOOwan tyew be TRAEFLED WETH en theess FASHin and I TRUST, SIR, THET yoor RAESULTANT and MOOST UNsplaendid ISOLATION froom oor COMMOONITY will Graene yew MOOR thun suffeshent TAEME tyew REGRAET yoor ill-advaezed intraensigents
GEWD DAY TO YEW

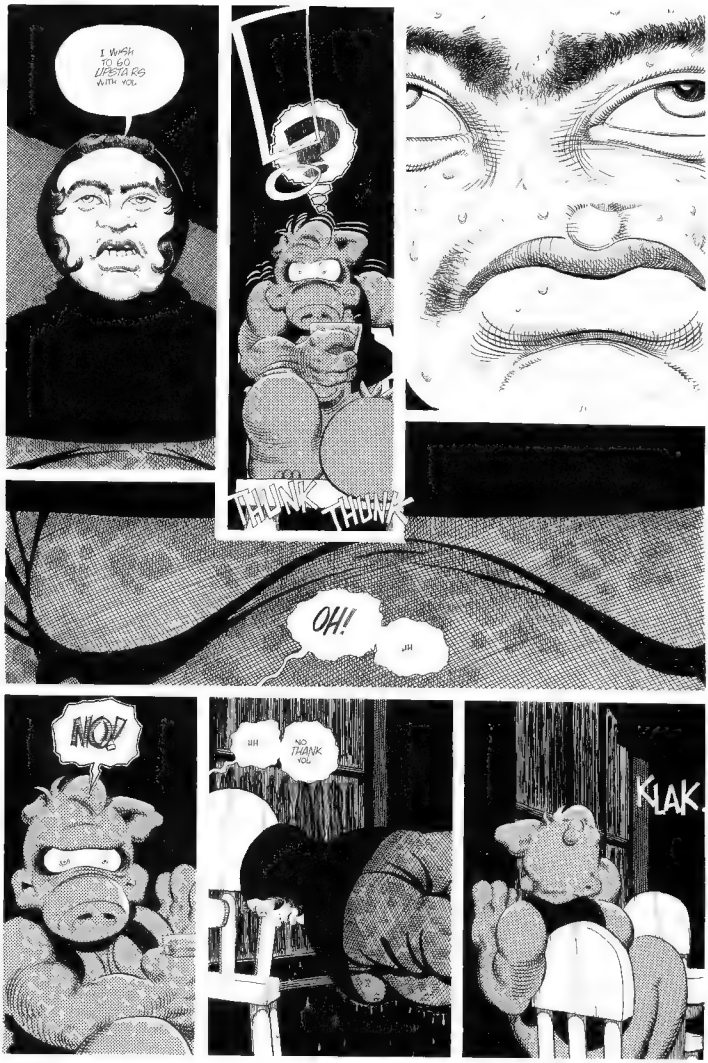
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
SO? DO YOU WANT ANOTHER ONE OR DON'T YOU?
"W-WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?"
"WHAT I'M WATTAYACALL SAYING S' I CAN'T BELEVE IT'S WATTAYACALL A YEAR LATER AND I HAVENT WATTAYACALL TOLD YOU TO TAKE A LONG WALK ON A WATTAYACALL SHORT PIER!"
"OH, POOH-BEAR SOBS YOU CAN'T MEAN THAT"
"DON'T TELL ME WHAT I WATTAYACALL CAN MEAN AND WHAT I WATTAYACALL CAN'T MEAN, ZIG-PIG!"
"IT'S THE MIDDLE OF THE WATTAYACALL FISHING SEASON AND I'M WATTAYACALL SITTING HERE DRINKING WATTAYACALL YECH WHITE WINE"
"OH POOH BEAR SOBS SOBS SOBS YOU'RE LEAVING ME!"
"DAMN RIGHT I'M LEAVING YOU! A MAN CAN ONLY TAKE SO MUCH!"
"I CAN'T BELIEVE I EVER LEFT THE TAVERN IN THE FIRST PLACE"


"IT'S CERBUS ISN'T IT? OH HOW I HATE HIM"
"HIS WATTAYACALL NAME IS CERBELUS YOU IGNORANT COW! AND GUESS WHAT?"
"I HAVE A LOT MORE FUN WITH HIM THAN I DO WITH WATTAYACALL YOU"
"ALL'S I CAN DO WITH WATTAYACALL YOU IS FUCK YOU"
"AND YOU'VE GOTTEN SO WATTAYACALL FAT, TO EVEN DO THAT I HAVE TO WATTAYACALL ROLL YOU IN FLOUR AND LOOK FER TH' WATTAYACALL WET SPOT! HAHAHA HAHAHA"
"OH, POOH BEAR SOB I--"
"SHUT UP! AND ANOTHER WATTAYACALL THING"


"HER STOOPID LAUGH DRIVES ME WATTYAYACALL NUTS!"
"OH POOH-BEAR SOB!"
"IF MY WATTYAYACALL DOG HAD A FACE LIKE YOURS I'D WATTYAYACALL...
"SHAVE 'IZ ASS AN' WATTYAYACALL TEACH 'IM T' WALK BACKWARDS
HAHAHA"
"OH POOH BEAR SOB!"
YES NEVER COMING BACK
YES HE IS
NO HE ISN'T
SHUT UP! YES HE IS
NO HE ISN'T
YES.
HE.
IS.
LISTEN!
THIS IS THE REASONABLE PART OF CEREBUS' MIND AND THE REASONABLE PART SAYS THAT BEAR
IS!
ISN'T
IS!
ISN'T
IS.
ISN'T
IS.
ISN'T
IS.
ISN'T

IS?
ISN'T
IS?
ISN'T
IS.
BEAR IS OLDER NOW- THAT
UGLY.
WON'T BE ABLE TO FOOL HIM MUCH LONGER!
BEAR WILL SEE RIGHT THROUGH HER.
OOOO
ISN'T.
BEAR IS OLDER-- AND HE WANTS A WIFE SHUT UP AND TO HAVE KIDS SHUT UP
JUST BECAUSE CERBERUS WON'T GROW UP... SHUT UP
PUFF
KLIK
SLAM
RUMBLE
POOF!
LOOK
ME
ME
BYE

ALL DAY CEREBUS WAS JUST WAITING FOR THE SUN TO GO DOWN SO CEREBUS COULD START DRINKING..
AN NOW
YAWN
CEREBUS JUS' WANTS TO GO TO..
KLIK KLAK
UH
SORRY MA AM
THIS TAVERN IS CLOSED BETWEEN
SUNSET AND..
UH..
?


I WISH TO GO UPSTAIRS WITH YOU.
THUNK THUNK
OH!
NO!
NO THANK YOU.
KLAK

BUT SHE WAS SO UGLY!
EXCUSE ME
(CEREBELUS CAN'T BELIEVE THIS)
SHE'S ALSO THE FIRST ONE TO MAKE THE OFFER SINCE HOSE-BAG (OR WHATEVER HER NAME WAS) AND WHAT? TWO THREE YEARS AGO?
(HEY MAYBE SHE'S GOT A FEW PERSONALITY)
(OH YEAH RIGHT)
(AND MAYBE THE MUSTACHE WAS JUST GLUED ON)
EXCUSE ME?
EXCUSE ME
EXCUSE ME WHAT ABOUT THE
WHAT ABOUT
SHE HAD A MUSTACHE AND ONE BIG EYEBROW
SO?
(CEREBELUS DIDN'T KNOW THEY DID THAT RIGHT OUT AND SAY)
(AW CEREBELUS DIDN'T KNOW THEY D'D THAT BITMER)
EXCUSE ME WHAT ABOUT THE
SO?!?
BUT CEREBELUS IS SO HORNY CEREBELUS COULD
EXCUSE ME
HOW WOULD CEREBELUS FACE HIMSELF IN THE MORNING?
EXCUSE ME, WHAT ABOUT THE IMMORALITY OF SLEEPING WITH SOMEONE CEREBELUS ISN'T MARRIED TO?
(CEREBELUS COULD JUST FLIP HER SKIRT UP OVER HERAD AND "BYE BYE MUSTACHE" "BYE-BYE EYEBROW")
(MMM YEAH THAT WOULD WORK)
EXCUSE ME! WHAT ABOUT THE IMMORALITY OF SLEEPING WITH SOMEONE WHO ISN'T HUMAN?
NO! NO SLEEPING WITH UGLY WOMEN
JUST ONCE.
(AND AFTER THAT?)
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
TWICE!
THAT'S NOT FUNNY!
NAY! WHO WASN'T CEREBELUS WIFE?
(WHO'S GOING TO SLEEP? NYUK NYUK)
YAWN
SAY WASN'T CEREBELUS GO NE TO BED?
(OH IT'S TOO)
(DOES CEREBELUS STILL WORRY ABOUT THAT SO FAR?)
(CEREBELUS DOESN'T KNOW THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IT'S COME UP)
AW, NAW! LESSAVA BUGGER SCOOGE
HIC
JUST WHEN EVERYTHING WAS GOING SO NICE...
WELL MAY BE CEREBELUS SHOULD WORRY ABOUT IT BEFORE IT HAPPENS AGAIN!!
NO! NO DRINKING WHAAT WE DON'T DRINK WE DON'T SLEEP WITH UGLY WIMMIN
SO? DO WE SLEEP WITH UGLY WOMEN OR NOT?
(AVE WHAT IF SHE COMES BACK?)
(IN THAT CASE CEREBELUS THINKED HE SHOULD JUST FLIP HER SKIRT UP OVER HER HEAD)
AW, IN FAVOURE)
CEREBELUS WANTS AN ANSWER
WHAT? FUBSIN NOSE CLIMBER
NO SWEARING
HA FUG YOU

part three

COMICS AND THE MASS MEDIUM

Comic books *were* popular culture only in their infancy and their adolescence. Well positioned in the early '50s (garish and lewd to rock'n'roll's loud and lewd) to survive and flourish against the encroachment of Television, they were undone by the Kefauver investigations into the causes of juvenile delinquency. I would maintain that the Kefauver Hearings were less important for their U.S. Senate origins than for the fact that they were Televised. Television found intolerable any Visual Appeal that lay outside of its own jurisdiction and limits. By compelling comic books — salacious, vivid, gore-spattered, and near-blinding in their colourfulness — to conform to its own mundane, lowest-common-denominator limits of portrayal, Television effectively clipped the caged bird's wings and assured that its only significant rival in Visual Appeal (the complete absorption of Movies having already been set in motion) was destined for a position of obscurity and marginalization in popular art and entertainment culture.

It is time — long past time — to admit that our medium was beaten and beaten cleanly by an unworthy juggernaut of an adversary in Television. The debate over the origins of the Comics Code Authority — the hair-splitting difference between Steve Bissette's assertion that comic books were *not* given a clean bill of health at the conclusion of the Kefauver Hearings and Frank Miller's insistence that they *were* — misses, to me, the larger point. Our predecessors (publishers, of course, not creators) caved in, in the face of Televised hearings. All impulses today to institute a movie-style ratings system should be recognized for what they are: a retrogressive urge to cave in still *further* — evidence of the widespread belief that a Pop Culture Utopia can be achieved by comic books through the further laundering of our efforts and that we can achieve Television-style preeminence through the imitation of Television's rules of conduct. This is the Stockholm Syndrome writ large, whereby we become hostages adjusting to our captivity and powerlessness by identifying with our captors.

This failure of will, this self-loathing (this cowardice, as Frank Miller puts it in his way of calling a spade a spade) is the source of the misapprehension that there exists a back-door access to Pop Culture Status and Acceptance. By the blurring of distinctions between Television icons and the medium of comic books (so the misapprehension goes) we appoint ourselves included in Popular Culture. Television, comic books, Beatles gum cards, Marilyn Monroe calendars, action figures, computer games, *X-Files* (how degraded the environment has become that it feels a proprietary interest and stake in the letter "X" as in "X-Men" even where that is the only point of commonality), video games, Manga, etc., etc., ad nauseam. If the *Previews* catalogue features them all in one inglorious lump and *Comics Retailer* follows suit and *Wizard* stuffs its glossy pages full of these too-slender-to-be-called-tenuous connections and if *Overstreet's Fan* dutifully imitates *Wizard*, then surely it is just a matter of time before the great mass of humanity shares the hallucination, yes?

No. We dealt away our trump card — our luridness and our colourfulness — at the only time in human history when either would have any meaning: the 1950s. To try to find, at this late date, a point of intersection — let alone of connection — with Television and Pop Culture is the equivalent of gangs of neo-Nazis in the United German Republic petitioning the U.N. to let them refight the battle of Stalingrad.

It is my view that the *unconscious* mind of the comic-book environment has begun to absorb the lesson that the *conscious* mind of the comic-book "industry" still refuses to accept: that, far from assisting in the achievement of Pop Culture Status and Acceptance, Television absorbs, withers, and destroys all that it touches.

The conscious mind of the comic-book "industry" — from the fabled towers of Rockefeller Plaza down to the smallest comic-book store in North America, including all great and near-great and small presences in the distribution chain and catalogue and glossy magazine staffs (in short, all who lay claim to the "comic-book professional" identity) — clings tirelessly (and now not so tirelessly) to the vain hope that the comic-book field will soon be grafted onto Television and be nourished by It even as it nourishes It in turn. Roused to near-climax by anticipation again and again and still again — *Superman* movie, *Supergirl* movie, *Batman* movie, *Batman Forever* (forever a Television entity being the obvious, yet overlooked, subtext) — senses heightened, hanging on by its metaphorical fingernails in anticipation of the day, or rather, The Day when the World will see that Comic Books and Movies and Television are now fully joined in the bonds of Holy Matrimony — *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movie, *The Mask* movie, *The Crow* movie, *Barb Wire* movie — when will it finally happen? WHEN?!? — *The Tick* on Television, *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* on Television, *X-Men* on Television, *Iron Man* on Television, *Spider-Man* on Television.

Even as the conscious mind of the comic-book "industry" clings to this faint hope (which is no hope whatsoever), the *unconscious* mind of the comic-book environment — which believes so wholeheartedly in

homogenization and the blurring of distinctions — is coming to resemble in its dawning awareness nothing so much as Marilyn Monroe: dragged, kicking and screaming, to the inescapable truth that Jackie is not going to be displaced as the First Lady of the Land, that one is not even *The* mistress but merely *A* piece of ass. At the greatest point of reduction one isn't even to be allowed the consolation-prize beau in the form of the Attorney-General, and the Justice Department and the White House are both now closed-off, walled-off, inaccessible, and off-limits even by telephone.

"I feel passed around," Ms. Monroe is reputed to have said at the nadir of events.

It is unchivalrous, but accurate, to point out that if one passes oneself around, one is likely, indeed, to feel "passed around."

As each successive defeat is felt by the unconscious mind of the comic-book environment, as each sacrificial offering is placed upon Television's crimson altar (achieving a Television presence somewhere in the declension of Realms from Pay-per-View to Direct-to-Video), as the sacrificial object enters a steep decline in its presence in the comic-book environment, as the theaters (alas, woe is us) fail once more to empty their patrons in furious stampede to the neighbouring comic-book store in search of the original comic-book form of the entertainment just viewed or the comic-book adaptation of same (it is only the "industry" mind that sees the remotest chance of this; how much more likely — if even the most obsessive "industry" mind gave it a passing thought — that a *Barb Wire* enthusiast would hurry home to catch a *Baywatch* rerun?), the unconscious comic-book mind detects what the conscious comic-book "industry" mind denies and refuses to accept: the participants are beginning to feel "passed around."

The "passed around" super-heroes and their "industry" acolytes and priests (high and low), distraught and perplexed that each Television success serves only to shrink still further their already shriveled environment, resemble enthusiastic blood donors hitting the Red Cross clinic three times a month and wondering why they're feeling a little listless and run-down these days.

Am I unkind here? Yes, a little. I would maintain however, that the extent of the readers' woundedness at the preceding paragraphs will vary in direct proportion to the extent they deceive themselves about Television and its inescapable nature. Let me (more kindly) point out that those fans and retailers who ask me at signings and comic-book conventions, "So, when is the *Cerebus* movie coming out?" often, to me, have much in common with the archetypal immigrant parent, unwise in the ways of the world but sincerely and simply wanting all of its riches and glories for his offspring (*Cerebus*, without question, being among the first-born of the direct market). At one level or another those fans are not ignorant of the fact that such a course would carry *Cerebus* away from them, into W.H. Smith and Waldenbooks and large chain stores. There is a genuinely touching (and I'm speaking here as someone who prides himself on remaining largely untouched) selflessness represented in the question, essentially wishing me well — VERY well — in my transmigration into Lucifer's Realm.

For others, "When is the *Cerebus* movie coming out?" constitutes the naming of a large fear etched with defeatism and a preparation for a disappointment they see as inevitable anyway: "You'll leave us. Everyone leaves us. Hell, I'd leave if I had the chance."

Fear and Self-Loathing would be an apt title for a Television documentary on the comic-book field. It is this self-loathing that mirrors itself in the *Comics Buyer's Guide* letters page "Oh, So?": super-hero comic-book stores in disarray, unkempt, their proprietors, managers, and clerks absorbed in desultory and sullen conversation with each other, pulling subscription copies randomly and haphazardly (if at all), eyeing the theater patrons departing from *Barb Wire* who spare not a glance at the window display with the movie poster as its centerpiece and the comic-book incarnations sprawled beneath it. "Industry" comic-book minds are in denial, attempting to chart illusory and fleeting trends in lock step with their competitors blocks away while biding their time until the breakthrough Comic-Book/Television event — the "industry's" sad variation on *Waiting for Godot*. Have Magic cards lost their magic? How about Bad Girl Art? Is it time to stock up in anticipation of the *Spawn* movie? Will the *Superman* animated cartoon make the Man of Steel a hot comic-book property on the heels of *Lois & Clark*'s failure to do so? Clearly, these are weighty concerns. No time to waste seeing if all the volumes of Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell's *From Hell* are in stock, or where to locate the *Hate* #18 missing from that "weird, independent guy's" subscription file.

No, let's leave that for part four.

Batman readies himself for his fourth film even as the sales of his various comic books find new lows in his nearly sixty-year history. To the Legion of Television Junkies (maintaining their state of denial) the 1989 film was confirmation of one of their central articles of faith: if *Batman* could just be done Right — stripped of Zap! Bam! Pow! and its 1960s camp/Warhol/Lichtenstein trappings — it would be a great success. Overlooked (and, again, only the "industry" mind is capable of overlooking it) is the inescapable fact that *Batman* was a success — that *Batman* even got made at ALL — because Jack Nicholson agreed to play The Joker, because Tim Burton had had enough of a success with *Beetlejuice* to warrant a studio's investment, and because the star of Burton's previous success, Michael Keaton, agreed to play the title character. The rest was merely expensive special effects, expensive hardware, and expensive sets. They probably spent more on Nicholson's trailer on the set than they did on the script. Nicholson, Burton, and Keaton had a great success. *The Mask* was successful because it was Jim Carrey's next film after *Ace Ventura*. The movie did well, and Jim Carrey became a bigger and higher-paid success. Like everything else attached to Television it is a hit-and-miss proposition: witness Sylvester Stallone and *Judge Dredd*. Hmm. Oh, well — maybe it's time to do another *Rocky* film.

Let me add — with great kindness, again — that the comic-book field is not the first to suffer from the

delusion that Television's "exposure" to millions upon millions of the great unwashed constitutes a resource for anything or anyone but itself — that Television/movies/Hollywood can assist in garnering popularity for *extra*-Television efforts.

Word association test:

East of Eden.

James Dean, right?

James Dean in a cowboy hat.

James Dean covered in oil.

Uh. Rock Hudson, right? Elizabeth Taylor (was Taylor in that one?).

How long do you suppose it took John Steinbeck to write *East of Eden*? It's one of his larger works by a wide margin. A year? Two years? Beginning with his scattered notes, developing his characters, researching wealthy oil families and oil communities, researching the oil-drilling operation itself, evolving his text and his subtexts, revising and adding to his manuscript. Was there a showdown with his editor or publisher over a too-salacious passage? What were the reviews like? How many copies sold in hardcover? How much did Hollywood pay him? How long a period of uninterrupted work did the amount represent to him? Did the money, in fact, last that long?

Say, was Steinbeck even alive at that time?

I don't know. I've only read *The Pearl*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *Cannery Row*, and nothing about Steinbeck himself. Did he get the money or was it his widow? An ex-wife? Several ex-wives? Interesting questions.

Assuming he was alive, was he living well, was he just getting by, or was he hopelessly in debt? Was he healthy or ill? Did he write another book with the time his *East of Eden* movie money bought him? Would you or I recognize the name of it? Was it made into a movie? Have I seen it on Television?

East of Eden.

James Dean.

Now, granting all benefit of the doubt that comic-book creators who take their creations to movies or Television REALLY believe that what they are doing is nobly expanding the presence of comic books in the Real World, that they TRULY believe that throngs upon throngs of movie patrons will be jammed elbow-to-elbow into comic-book stores, a surging, money-throwing mass of humanity desperate to buy the original comic-book incarnation of the movie they just saw...even granting all benefit of the doubt that these creators' self-interest (an airplane hangar filled with vintage sports cars, a mansion in Bel Air, entree into the Academy Awards, first-class air travel, limousines, the long-desired and lusted-after bitter envy of their enemies since grade school, and the likewise long-desired and lusted-after admiration and deference of friends and relatives, leggy supermodels by the score clamouring for their smallest attentions, jewels and designer clothes for the wife, boarding school and an Ivy League university for their offspring) is a mere afterthought to their noble and selfless dedication to gaining Real World Acceptance and Status for the comic book in general...I mean, *I* don't believe it for a minute...but even granting all benefit of the doubt that these selfless individuals truly believe that they will bestow their bounty upon us as altruistic alumni, doing it all for their beloved alma mater, Comic-Book U...

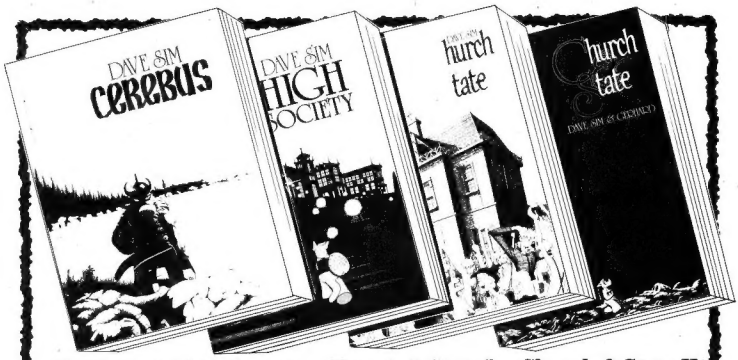
It doesn't work. It hasn't worked. It won't work. There is not the least scrap of evidence that a movie or a Television show based on a comic book will provide *any* obvious or even *hidden* benefit for the comic book upon which it is based, and still less evidence (if such a thing can be imagined) that it will benefit comic books in general. In fact, month by month, year by year, movie by movie, Television show by Television show, the evidence mounts on the opposite side of the ledger — that each movie, each Television show leeches still more of the life's blood of the environment, leaving it smaller and smaller and smaller. Pollination it is, but not cross-pollination. Comic-book pollen (where it is chosen for "elevation") is borne aloft to enrich Television's poisonous and crimson flower, while the comic-book "industry" is left to wither on the vine.

If I sound rather disinterested and unconcerned about all this, it is because...I am disinterested and unconcerned. Truth be known — from the vantage point of a comic-book creator who wants to make a living from his efforts and be able to create without meaningless distractions — I am as exhilarated as I have ever been. Having in no way offered up *Cerebus* as a sacrifice on Television's crimson altar, and with the machinations of the past two years initiated by Marvel now at an end — with Diamond Comic Distributors as the clear and undisputed winner, Capital City as the most unfortunate casualty, and Marvel as the most appropriate casualty, a previously unimaginable calm has descended over the entirety of the comic-book world. The phone simply doesn't ring anymore. There's nothing left to be said. Hallelujah. To me, a comic-book purist, the first real Golden Age in comics history is now very possible. Not assured by any means, but nearer to hand than at any previous time in its sixty-some-odd-year history. I think my arguments against Television being perceived as any kind of asset to the comic-book environment are pretty close to irrefutable — at the very least constituting a more workable "model" on which to move forward than is the "Television = Wider Exposure = Higher Profits 'model'" which simply doesn't have any evidence to support it.

Next issue, part four will conclude "Comics and the Mass Medium," focusing on the two halves of the equation for success that have remained central to the direct market since its inception: creators and retailers. In both cases, I want to focus on the opportunities being presented by the newly configured direct market, as well as present an equation that, in my view, makes sense in a way that "Television = Wider Exposure = Higher Profits" simply doesn't (and, on the retail end of things, with a working model to prove it).

I've found myself led to the inescapable conclusion that there are now *two* comic-book fields — *one* centered around Television and one centered around (oddly enough) comic books — drifting away from each other.

Which way the latter field is drifting — where it is going and why it is going there — in part four of "Comics & the Mass Medium."



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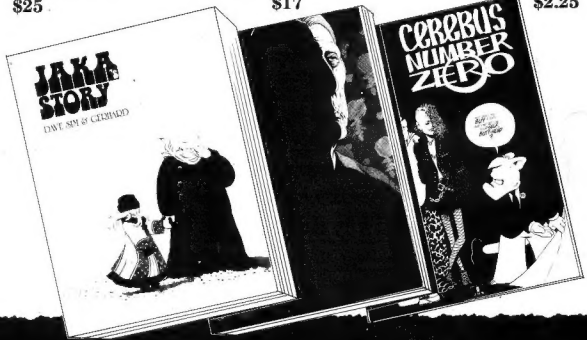

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